

ACTION INFORMATION SHEET

You and Your Middle School-aged Child

The middle-school years build upon and deepen the skills learned in elementary school. They also prepare your child for high school and for life after graduation. You can help your child succeed by being involved with his or her education. Your child is changing, but he or she still needs your involvement.

Support Your Child's Path to Success

Before the school year begins, find out about the school your child will attend. Visit the school and obtain a copy of the school's parent involvement plan, if available. Discover what extracurricular opportunities or programs may be available to students, and ask your child what interests him or her.

At the beginning of the year, ask the principal:

- Does the school place my child according to his or her ability in core subject areas?
- Does the school begin to prepare my child for high school success by teaching needed skills such as effective approaches to studying or managing long-term assignments?
- What tests does the school use to measure my child's progress?
- How do parents know if the teachers are highly qualified to teach?
- Can I attend middle-school orientation with my child?
- Is there a family center at the school?
- Is the school meeting the academic goals set by the state?

Ask the principal for a district or school report card to see if students are making progress. You also can visit <http://education.state.mn.us/ReportCard2005/index.do> for specific information about your child's school.

If the school to which your child would normally be assigned is not meeting the state's academic goals, your child may qualify to transfer to another public school, including a public charter school. Also, if the school is not meeting the state's goals, your child may be eligible to receive free tutoring and other supportive services. Contact your school district to find out more about these opportunities.

Communicate with the School

In school, teachers are your partners in helping your child grow. They should be helpful and willing to meet with you.

Things to tell teachers or principals:

- Explain your child's needs so they better understand them and can help meet them.
- Share any problems at home that may affect your child's school performance, such as illness or divorce.
- Ask the school to arrange for someone who is bilingual to help you when you meet with your child's teacher if English is not your first language.
- Have the school provide materials in your native language if possible.

Support Your Child in Middle School

You can do many things to support your child's progress in the middle grades.

Things you can do at home to support your child:

- Provide your child with reading materials. Let your child see you reading for pleasure; encourage this habit in your child.
- Use the local library and the Internet as sources for literacy activities, homework support, and opportunities to pursue outside interests.
- Make sure your child does his or her homework. Give your child the chance to be responsible and to work on his or her own; encourage those efforts.

- Continue to provide steady guidance. While your child is beginning to show more independence, he or she still needs you.
- Pay attention to how much your child watches TV, uses the computer, or plays video games. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests no more than one to two hours of viewing per day.
- Listen carefully to what your child says and talk with him or her often. Research shows that children who talk with the adults in their lives are not only more successful students, but also healthier, happier people.

Advocate for Your Child, Partner with Teachers

In middle school, students typically are taught by individual teachers in core subjects. In addition, they may have one teacher, adviser, or counselor as their central contact. While the student may meet with this adult for only a brief period daily, this adult is intended to be “home base” for your child, and your key contact.

Ways to advocate include:

- Contact the key adult immediately if you notice a negative change in your child’s behavior or school work, so you can identify and address problems at school before they become worse.
- Request a meeting with a teacher if you have concerns about your child.
- Help your child to check teachers’ web sites where they post class notes and homework assignments if your child is struggling to handle assignments.
- Attend school open houses or parent nights to meet your child’s teachers.
- Contact the teachers if your child regularly doesn’t understand an assignment or needs extra help, or feels uncomfortable with any situation. Many teachers will give you their e-mail addresses so you may contact them easily if you have access to a computer and e-mail.
- Attend scheduled school conferences; be prepared to listen and talk. You may find it helpful to write out questions beforehand. The teachers should be very specific about your child’s work and progress. Think about what the teachers tell you and check back with them to see how things are going as the year progresses.

Look Ahead to High School

Even though it may seem early to think about the future, middle school is an important step toward attaining a postsecondary education or training.

- Communicate your expectations for academic success to your child.
- Help your child see that the academic skills strengthened in middle school will support success in high school.

Find More Ideas at the Minnesota Parent Center

The Minnesota Parent Center helps parents be strong partners in their child’s education. It also encourages community involvement to help all children be prepared for school and to succeed when they arrive there. The center’s multicultural staff can answer questions about early childhood learning and school-related problems for all children. It also provides helpful written materials and offers workshops on topics such as the No Child Left Behind Act, parental involvement, and more. All services are free.

Call 952-838-9000 or 800-537-2237 (toll free in Greater Minnesota) to see how you can help your child do well in school. You also can learn more online at www.PACER.org/mpc.

This handout was adapted with permission from “You and Your Elementary School-Aged Child,” U.S. Department of Education.

This publication was produced in whole or in part with funds from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, Parental Information and Resource Center program, under Grant # 84.310A. The content herein does not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Education, any other agency of the U.S. government, or any other source.

Minnesota Parent Center, a project of PACER Center, Inc., is funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

PACER is a statewide nonprofit organization. It supports the educational rights of children with and without disabilities. It offers workshops, individual assistance, written information, and more.